

SEEING ALL SIDES

Grade Level: 6-12

Time: 1-2 hours

WHAT IS IT?

This is an exercise where students practice seeing an issue from different points of view. Students identify examples of cross-cultural misunderstandings in their own school and ways to resolve them.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Public work involves working in and through diversity in order to solve problems. Sometimes this means working with people with whom you disagree. By understand everyone's point of view, teams can actually come up with stronger and more creative solutions.

MATERIALS: None

ACTIVITIES/STEPS:

- 1) Explain to students that there are often several reasonable ways to view a situation, sometimes influenced by your culture. Explain that being able to see multiple sides of an issue is an important life skill. Ask students why they think this may be so. Explain to students that actively listening to another's viewpoint with an open mind is sometimes the most powerful thing they can do when misunderstandings occur.
- 2) Review the rules of active listening. (Maintain direct eye contact. No interruptions. Keep an encouraging facial expression. Use positive body language. If the person who is speaking gets stuck, ask: Is there more you would like me to know? and then resume listening.) Ask for two student volunteers to model the skill of active listening in a brief conversation about "Something surprising that happened to me this week." One student will be the speaker and one student will be the active listener.
- 3) Inform students that they will now have the opportunity to practice seeing an issue from different points of view.
- 4) On each of four pieces of chart paper write one of the following: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree. Tape each piece of chart paper on the wall in a different corner of the room.
- 5) Explain to students that in a moment, you will state a controversial issue and they will have the opportunity to express their opinion on it by moving to one of the four corners of the room. When they have moved to their desired corner, ask students to discuss the reasons why they have taken this position on the issue.
- 6) State the following issue: My way of doing things is the best way of doing things. Have students move to their desired corner—the one that expresses their opinion on this issue.
- 7) Ask students to form pairs and explain the reasons behind their opinions to each other (using active listening). After students have had a chance to discuss the reasons for their position, ask a spokesperson from each corner to state the reasons behind their group's position.

- 8) Next, let students know that they will have an opportunity to see the issue from another point of view. Ask the “Strongly Agree” group to move to the “Disagree” group’s corner and the “Disagree” group to move to the “Strongly Agree” corner. Then ask the “Strongly Disagree” group to move to the “Agree” group’s corner, as the “Agree” group moves to the “Strongly Disagree” group’s corner.
- 9) When students have moved to their designated corners, ask them to put their first opinion aside for a moment, to keep an open mind, and to try to think of all the reasons why they might take the opposite position on the same statement: My way of doing things is the best way of doing things.
- 10) After students have had a chance to discuss the reasons for their “new” position with a partner (again, using active listening), ask a spokesperson from each corner to state the reasons behind their group’s “new” position.
- 11) When the discussion has ended, explain to students that the discomfort they might have felt having to take a position opposite to their true feelings, is somewhat like the discomfort they might feel when they are in another culture that sees some things differently than they do.

EVALUATION:

- Debrief the activity by asking students how it felt to let go of their original positions and see the issue from another viewpoint.
- Brief discussions describing student positions on issues.
- Ask students: How would putting this idea into practice make our world a better place? Make our school a better place? Ask them to respond to this question first in a class discussion and then as a journal entry.
- Ask students to describe a situation in which they were misunderstood by others. Have them journal about it from two points of view: their own point of view and the other person’s point of view.

Source: Adapted from <http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/guides/insights/service/lesson3/lesson3.html>